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ABSTRACT

This study examined how a teacher's attachment history influenced the quality of the teacher-child attachment relationship, and how racial differences between teacher and child influence the quality of the attachment relationship. Participating were 55 undergraduate education majors entering their final field placement. The sample was mostly female, with an average age of 27 years; 86 percent were Caucasian and 10 percent African-American; most came from a middle-class background. At the beginning of their field placement, subjects completed the Attachment History Questionnaire (AHQ), which asked about their relationship with parents and peers. At the end of their placement, they completed the Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) regarding the quality of their relationship with five randomly selected students in their classroom. Results indicated that of the four subscales used to measure teacher-child attachment relationships, only two of them, conflict/anger and warmth, showed significant relationships with the subject's attachment history. Two multiple regression analyses could not identify a model predicting the quality of the teacher-child relationship which accounted for more than 6 percent of the variance. The ethnic match between teacher and child influenced quality of the teacher-child attachment relationship, with a main effect of racial dissimilarity on open communication with Caucasian teachers only. (Contains eight references.) (KB)

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Ethnicity and Gender and the Quality of Teacher-Child Attachment Relationships

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Introduction

Recent research on teacher-child relationships have found that Bowlby's (1969, 1972,1980) attachment theory has much to offer in terms of understanding how this relationship influences children's social and academic development. Beginning in early childhood, the relationship that develops between children and their secondary caregivers have been shown to have an impact on social competence with adults and other children. Howes, Matheson and Hamilton (1994) in a study of 4 year olds found that security of attachment to caregiver had a main effect on peer competence. Specifically, Howes et al found that those children secure in their relationship with their caregiver engaged in more gregarious, complex play, were more positive in their play and in general had higher sociometric ratings than those in an insecure relationship with their teacher.

The importance of teacher-child attachment relationships continues when the child reaches school-age. Pianta and Nimetz (1991) designed a teacher questionnaire to assess the teacher's internal working model of the relationship with children in their class. Pianta et al (1991) found significant relationships between a children's social competence and the teacher's ratings of their attachment relationship to the child. Additionally, the quality of teacher-child relationships in kindergarten have been shown to be related to adjustment in first grade (Pianta 1994). These findings suggest that teacher-child relationships are influential in how successful children will be in school.

Teacher's Attachment History and Attachment Relationships

A critical aspect in any attachment relationship is the attitudes and behavior of the individual regarding their role as an attachment figure. The sensitivity and appropriateness of caregiving behaviors is central to the quality of the attachment relationship that forms between attachment figure and child (Bowlby, 1969). The teacher's ability to perceive and respond appropriately to the child's attachment needs is critical in determining how well the child's expressed attachment needs are met. Thus, characteristics of teachers are a critical factor in determining the quality of the relationship that develops.

Past research has shown that teachers with whom children form secure attachments are less harsh and detached than teachers with whom children form insecure attachments. Additionally, children develop secure attachment relationships with teachers who are more responsive and involved (Howes & Hamilton, 1992).

As in parent-child attachments the teacher's attachment history plays a critical role in how the teacher approaches these relationships. How teachers perceive a student's attachment needs is based in large part on the internal model they have developed in regard to attachment relationships (Pianta, & Steinberg, 1992). The teachers' own attachment history will influence how they perceive the attachment needs of their students and thus the relationship. However, it is unclear what happens to the development of the teacher-child attachment relationship when the teacher and child are of different races? Cultural differences between teachers and children may create a gulf of misunderstanding that could adversely affect the teacher-child relationship and ultimately the child's success in school. The purpose of this study was to examine how the teacher's attachment history influenced the quality of the teacher-child attachment relationship, and how racial differences between teacher and child influence the quality of the attachment relationship.

Methods

Fifty-five undergraduate education majors entering their final field placement comprised this sample. The sample was mostly female, with an average age of 27 years. Eighty-six percent of the sample were Caucasian, and 10%African-American, 4% Hispanic, and 1% Asian, coming from a mostly middle class background (Hollingshead SES mean=61).

Subjects were recruited at the beginning of a field placement where they would be placed in an elementary classroom for 10 weeks. Subjects were told that their assistance was needed to help evaluate their student-teaching experience. Initially, subjects completed a brief family history questionnaire which asked about their family background along with questions regarding their relationship experiences with their parents and peers. At the end of the field placement, subjects completed a questionnaire regarding their relationship with 5 students in their classroom chosen at random. These questionnaires assessed the

quality of their relationship with each student. Instruments are discussed below:

The Attachment History Questionnaire (AHQ). The AHQ (Pottharst & Kessler, 1990) is a measure designed to examine the childhood history of the individual in regard to attachment issues. This measure covers topics that are relevant to childhood attachment experiences such as separations, threatened separations, parental discipline, parent-child interactions and peer relationships. The respondent rated how often his parents engaged in the behaviors described on a seven-point Likert-type format, ranging from "never" to "always". The scores were analyzed according to four factor based subscales identified as (a) secure attachment base, (b) parental discipline, (c)threats of separation. and (d) peer affectional support.. Cronbach alpha coefficients for this group were .92 for the secure base subscale, .85 for the parental discipline subscale, .88 for the separation subscale, and .47 for the peer affiliation subscale.

Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS). The STRS (Pianta & Steinberg, 1992) is a 30 item self-report measure designed to assess a teacher's feelings about his/her relationship with a particular student, the student's interactive behavior, and how the teacher thinks the student feels about him/her. The measure yields 5 factor-based subscales: (a) conflict/anger, (b) warmth, © open communication, (d) dependency, and (e) troubled feelings. Internal reliabilities for this measure based on Cronbach's alpha were: .91, .82, .62, .48 and -.27 respectively. Because of the low reliability of the "troubled feelings" subscale it was not used in subsequent analysis. There is also a total scale score that is formulated by reversing negatively worded items and summing all items.

Results

Correlational analyses revealed that of the four subscales used to measure teacher-child attachment relationships, only two of them, conflict/anger and warmth, showed significant relationships with the subject's attachment history. Specifically, the conflict/anger subscale of the STRS was negatively correlated to the secure base subscale of the AHQ ® = -.13, $p < .05$), and negatively correlated to the peer affectional support subscale of the AHQ ® = -.12, $p < .05$). The warmth subscale of the STRS was negatively correlated to the separation and parental discipline subscales of the AHQ ® = -.19, $p < .01$; r =

-.23, $p < .001$ respectively). Warmth was positively related to the secure base and peer affectional support subscales of the AHQ ® = .22, $p < .001$; $r = .13$, $p < .05$ respectively).

Two multiple regressions were carried out to assess the ability of the AHQ variables in predicting the quality of the teacher-child relationship. The first multiple regression analysis included the four AHQ subscales as independent variables and the warmth subscale of the STRS as dependent variable was carried out. Although a significant model emerged ($F = 4.8$, $p < .001$) this model only accounted for 6% of the variance in predicting warmth. A stepwise regression analysis, identical to the first, was carried out and the only variable to enter the model was parental discipline ($F = 15.3$, $p < .001$) again this model only accounted for 5% of the variance. The second multiple regression included the four AHQ subscales as independent variables and conflict/anger of the STRS as the dependent variable. No significant model emerged from this analysis.

To assess the effects of teacher-child racial dissimilarity one-way ANOVAs were carried out with all subjects, then with Caucasian only and non-Caucasian only groups. With all subjects entered, a significant difference was found on the open communication subscale of the STRS when the teacher was from a different ethnic group than the child ($f(1, 273)=4.1$, $p < .05$). No other significant differences were found. When only Caucasian subjects reported on relationships with children of a different ethnicity than themselves a significant difference was again found on open communication only ($f(1, 233)=7.4$, $p < .01$). No other significant differences were found, although a difference on the conflict/anger subscale approached significance ($f(1, 233)=3.3$, $p = .06$). However, when non-Caucasian subjects reported on relationships with children of a different ethnicity no significant differences were found on any of the STRS subscales.

Discussion

These data suggest that the subject's attachment history was a significant factor in helping to determine the quality of the teacher-child relationship. However, it should be noted that these factors only accounted for around 6 % of the variance in the regression models and then with only one subscale of the STRS(warmth). Thus, their significance is limited and although they are a part of what determines the

quality of the teacher-child relationship, obviously there are many other factors that influence this relationship.

The ethnic match between teacher and child did seem to be a significant factor in helping to determine the quality of the teacher-child attachment relationship. Analyses revealed a main effect of racial dissimilarity on "open communication" with only Caucasian teachers. There was no main effects of racial dissimilarity with non-Caucasian teachers. The three items that made up the open-communication subscale covered behaviors of both teacher and child. The items included: (1) "This child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself." (2) "This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me." (3) "It is easy to be in tune with what this student is feeling." Thus there seems to be relational difficulties between Caucasian teachers and non-Caucasian children in relation to both verbal and non-verbal communication. Two of the three items report child behaviors, thus suggesting that it is the child who has difficulties relating to teachers of a different ethnic group from their own. However, it is important to note that the STRS used teacher's perceptions of the child's behaviors. Thus, it is more likely that the teacher is projecting their own difficulties in relating to children of ethnic groups other than their own on the child. It is impossible from these data to be certain whether these relational difficulties exist in the child or in the teacher.

It should be noted that the nature of this sample prevents generalization to a larger population. Future research should include data from regular classroom teachers and data from the child. Third person observation of the interactions between teachers and children of differing ethnic groups should also be included to determine the specific dynamics of relationships between teachers and children of different ethnic groups.

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